

SEMI RAMIS

TRAGEDY.

Translated from the FRENCH OF

Aronet
16

De VOLTAIRE

Prima est hæc ultio
Quod se iudice nemo nocens absolvitur,

*Murder, though it has no tongue,
Will speak with most tremendous organs.*

SHAKESPEARE

L O N D O N :

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SEMPER PARATI

Y E D A T

V O L A T I V

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DRAMATIC PERSONS

MEN

Asinius, otherwise Ninius,
a prince of the house of Bani.
Onyx, the High Priest.
Onyx, a minister, devoted to Asinius.
Onyx, the friend of Asinius.
Onyx, a follower of Asinius.

WOMEN

Asinius, daughter of the king.
Onyx, a friend of the family of Bani.
Onyx, wife of Asinius.

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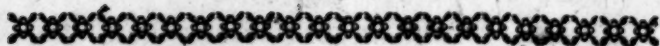
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

- ARZACES, otherwise NINIAS.
• ASSUR, a prince of the family of Belus.
OROES, the High-priest.
OTANES, a minister, devoted to SEMIRAMIS.
MITRANES, the friend of ARZACES.
• CEDAR, a follower of ASSUR.

WOMEN.

- SEMIRAMIS, Queen of the east.
AZEMA, a princess of the family of Belus.
Guards, Magi, Slaves, Attendants.





SEMIRAMIS:

A TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Scene represents a vista of considerable length, at the end of which, the palace of Semiramis appears. Gardens are seen raised above the palace: the temple of the Magi occupies the right, and a mausoleum, adorned with obelisks, stands opposite to it on the left. Two slaves are seen bearing a casket at a distance.

ARZACES and MITRANES.

ARZACES.

MITRANES, yes, kind fate's directing hand
Restores ARZACES to his native soil,
And to the arms of thee his faithful friend.
Heavens! how the powerful genius of the
queen

Displays on every side magnificence!

What wonderful art has form'd this channel's depth,

B

To

To which Euphrates with surprize conveys
 The needful tribute of his watry store?
 This temple, glory of the architect,
 These hanging gardens rais'd in ambient air,
 This solemn shrine where NINUS lies interr'd
 For ever shall proclaim the queen's renown.
 Hither her high behests invite my steps;
 Tho' eastern kings at awful distance bow,
 Proud to behold her greatness from afar,
 SEMIRAMIS admits me to her presence.

MITRANES.

Beware, ARZACES, Fame is oft deceitful:
 This object of your wonder may excite
 Grief and compassion when beheld too nigh.

ARZACES.

Say you?

MITRANES.

SEMIRAMIS, a prey to her affliction,
 Imparts to all the court her inward woe:
 Each soul is seiz'd with sympathizing horror:
 Sometimes with screams of grief she fills the air,
 Anon dejected, languishing, unquiet,
 She seems to fly from some vindictive God,
 And falls upon her knees in this recess,
 Sacred to night, to silence and to death:
 Gloomy retreat, by mortals ne'er explor'd,
 Where NINUS' royal ashes lie intomb'd;
 With haggard air, with timid steps and slow
 She often to the sepulchre approaches,
 And strikes her aching bosom bath'd with tears.
 Breaking the horrid silence, oft her lips
 Articulate the names of son and husband:

The

A T R A G E D Y.

3.

The gods she oft invokes ; the angry gods
With unrelenting rigour hear her cries.

ARZACES.

Say from what source springs misery so dire ?

MITRANES.

The sad effect is felt ; the cause unknown.

ARZACES.

How long has thus vindictive Heaven pursued her ?

MITRANES.

Since first she sent for you to come to court.

ARZACES.

Since first she sent for me ?

MITRANES.

My lord, when Babylon with joy resounded
And blazing fires were kindled by your conquests ;
When hostile standards hung aloft, display'd
Trophies of states your conquering arm subdu'd ;
When with surprise Euphrates' stream beheld
Shine forth with lustre on his fertile banks,
The beauteous AZEMA, my sovereign's niece ;
To whose illustrious veins the blood of BELUS
Has been transmitted by a race of kings :
The majesty of Babylon's proud queen
Even then was blasted in those days of triumph,
And languish'd in the time of public joy.

ARZACES.

From whate'er cause this trouble may take rise,
AZEMA sure is innocent—one look
Of that enchanting fair—one might appease
The angry gods——no evil can arise
From such a model of transcendent goodness :

B 2

But

But sure, SEMIRAMIS that rules the helm,
Cannot be always thus o'erwhelm'd with grief.

MITRANES.

Sometimes her mind heaves off it's load of grief
And shines confest in all it's force and lustre:
I recognize that fierce ambitious soul,
To which the greatest kings on earth ador'd,
Are not by adulation's voice compar'd.
But when she to her inward anguish yields,
Whilst her hands loosely hold the reins of empire,
Then haughty ASSUR, insolent, and fierce,
Beneath his yoke makes all the palace groan,
And rules despotic with an iron rod.
This secret of the state, the throne's disgrace,
As yet, has been confin'd within our walls:
Abroad we're envied; but at home we groan.

ARZACES.

From hence what lessons may frail mortals learn!
How happiness is dash'd with odious grief!
Alas, an equal anguish tears my breast;
At distance from that sage, whose prudent hand
Had serv'd to guide my wandering steps at court,
A prey to all the passions of rash youth;
Abandon'd to my pride and my presumption,
I sail amidst surrounding rocks and shoals,
No friendly pilot to direct my course.

MITRANES.

Like you I mourn'd that venerable man;
PHRADATES was my friend, I weep his loss;
Him NINUS lov'd, and to his guardian care
Entrusted NINIAS his only son,
In whom the kingdom's hopes were all concenter'd.

One

One day saw son and sire descend to death,
 To voluntary exile then he went,
 But to his exile you your greatness owe,
 By him to honour train'd, in glory's field
 New provinces you've added to our empire
 And on a level with the greatest monarchs ;
 To your own worth you owe your eminence.

ARZACES.

What fate prepares me here? I'm yet to know.
 Oft have th' ensanguin'd plains of Arbazan
 Beheld success attend upon my arms,
 And I can boast my share of martial fame ;
 When Oxus' distant banks beheld your queen
 Triumphant o'er a hundred vanquish'd nations,
 That bow'd submissive and receiv'd her laws ;
 She from her lofty car has deign'd to shed
 A ray of glory on my early youth ;
 But who can trust to fickle fortune's smiles,
 Hemm'd round with glory in th' intended field ?
 Soldiers may be neglected in a court.
 My dying father told me, " Son your all
 " Must now depend upon the common cause :"
 And to my hands this precious pledge he gave,
 Preserv'd with care, remote from eyes prophane ;
 To the high-priest I must deliver it,
 It's consequence is known to none but him,
 To him I must apply to know my fate,
 Tis he must to SEMIRAMIS present me.

MITRANES.

To court he seldom comes : obscure, unknown
 He lives devoted to religion's care,
 From fear and from ambition both exempt,

The

The temple, not the palace he frequents.
 He ne'er with kingly pride aspir'd to place
 The priest's tiara by the diadem.
 Grandeur he shuns and is the more rever'd :
 I to his presence ever find access,
 In secret I'll apprize him that you're come,
 E'er on the world sol brighter light bestows,
 In private here you shall confer with him.

S C E N E II.

ARZACES *solus.*

To what am I by heaven's high will ordain'd ?
 Why on his death-bed did my aged fire
 To this religious dome direct my steps ?
 What service can Chaldean gods desire
 From me a soldier bred to war's alarms,
 From me by love's almighty power enslav'd :
 But whence that dismal voice ? that scream of woe ?

*[Groans are heard from the bottom of the tomb
 of Ninus.]*

A cry from yonder vaulted mansion sent,
 Congeals my blood and shakes my soul with horror :
 Tis said that here the ghost of NINUS haunts—
 Amazement seizes me, the cry redoubles,
 Oh sacred, gloomy dwelling, royal shade,
 Oh awful voice divine, what should I do !

S C E N E

A TRAGEDY.

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SCENE III.

ARZACES, *the High-Priest* OROES, *High-Priest's followers*, MITRANES.

MITRANES *to the High-Priest.*

ARZACES to your sacred hands, my lord,
Presents that pledge you've waited for so long.

ARZACES.

Oh sacred pontiff of Chaldea's god,
Hear the last will of my expiring fire,
My fire, whose eyes these hands have lately closed:
You lov'd him in his life——

OROES.

Undaunted youth,
Tis not so much the order of your fire,
As the high will of an all-ruling God
That brings you now to my rejoicing fight.
Still in my memory PHRADATES lives,
The fire I lov'd, and I must love the son.
Where is that precious pledge his will consigns me?

ARZACES.

Behold them here.

[*The slaves give the coffer to two Magi, who lay it upon an altar.*]

OROES *opens the coffer and bending towards it with respect, delivers himself as follows.*

Do I then touch you, oh! you precious relics?
And do my lips press those sad monuments
That make my aged eyes o'erflow with tears,
Whilst my lov'd friend's idea you recall?
Retire from hence you Magi, you MITRANES,

Take

Take care that none of the prophane approach.

[The Magi retires.]

Behold the seal, to whose august impression,
The laws of NINUS erst their sanction ow'd:
The letter written by his dying hand
When death had chill'd his nerves, here meets my sight;
Adore this diadem that bound his brows;
This sword is destin'd to revenge his death,
This sword that to our monarch's yoke reduc'd
Persia, and Media, instrument too weak
Against vile treason and the poison's rage,
Whose mortal venom and whose sure effect—

ARZACES.

What do I hear, ye gods—

OROES.

These secrets dire
Darkness profound still veils from human sight.
The voice of NINUS' blood cries from the ground,
The gods have call'd for vengeance but in vain.

ARZACES.

Oh, think what terror seiz'd my awe-struck soul,
E'en from the jaws of yonder sepulchre
A frightful groan assail'd my list'ning ears.

OROES.

This sound of death is royal NINUS' voice.

ARZACES.

Twice have they pierc'd my shudd'ring soul with horror.

OROES.

They call for vengeance—

MITRANES.

NINUS has a right
To vengeance, but whose arm must strike the blow?

OROES.

A TRAGEDY.

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OROES.

The parricides whose impious hands depriv'd
Afflicted mortals of so good a king,
Their curst treason carefully conceal'd;
Impenetrable darkness hides it from us.
With ease the eyes of mortals they've deceiv'd,
But they can ne'er escape that piercing sight
That at one glance pervades the universe.

ARZACES.

Oh, could my feeble hand revenge his death!
This fatal tomb, I know not why, conveys
Astonishment and horror to my soul;
May I consult the manes of the king?

OROES.

Approach it not my son, the voice severe
Of awful oracles forbids access
To this abode of death; by angry gods
Tis guarded, and by vengeance fenced round.
With patience wait till awful justice come:
The hour is near, blood shall for blood atone,
More I am not permitted to reveal;
I oft with care consult the will divine
Which now inspires, and now withholds its light.
I have declar'd what heaven imparts—beware
Least by a look or gesture you betray
A secret which the God I serve reveals.
The glory of that God, and Asia's fate
Depend upon your prudence—Magi rever'd,
Under the altar place this sacred pledge.

*[The gate of the palace opens, and guards surround it.
Assur appears with his followers on the other side.]*

C

The

The palace gates are open'd—you behold
 ASSUR furrounded with a courtly crowd
 That cringes humbly, and adores his power,
 The gods instruct us greatness to despise,
 When they confer it on so bad a man.

ARZACES.

Is that the tyrant ?

OROS.

When the shades of night
 Extend their darkness o'er these guilty walls
 In presence of the gods we will confer.

ARZACES.

Fear them, e'en now their eyes are fix'd upon thee.

S C E N E IV.

*Arzaces appears on the front of the theatre with Mitranes.
 Assur is seen at one side with Odar and his followers.*

ARZACES.

How much this tale of woe affects my mind !
 How horrid are the secrets of this court !
 By poison then the royal NINUS died,
 And well I see this ASSUR is suspected.

MITRANES, *approaching* ARZACES.

ASSUR from sacred kings derives his birth,
 To his high station deference is due :
 The queen respects him, he by all is fear'd,
 To ASSUR you may bend without disgrace.

ARZACES.

To impious ASSUR stain'd with NINUS' blood !

ASSUR

A TRAGEDY.

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ASSUR to CEDAR at a distance.

And is ARZACES then at Babylon?

Without my order, dares he thus approach?

ARZACES.

Insulting tyrant!

ASSUR.

What strange motive——say,

Makes you abandon thus the tented field?

The banks of OXUS why do you forsake?

ARZACES.

By the queen's order I appear at court.

ASSUR.

The queen then sent for you—

ARZACES.

She did, my lord.

ASSUR.

And know'st thou not my order is requir'd,

E'er thou can'st gain admittance to the throne?

ARZACES.

My lord, I knew it not, and should have deem'd,

If it were so, the diadem disgrac'd.

A soldier's frankness may perhaps offend,

To seats of arms inur'd on Scythia's plains;

I could not learn to know, but serve the court.

ASSUR.

Tho' inexperience, you may learn from time,

But say, what would you with SEMIRAMIS?

I only can admit you to the throne.

ARZACES.

The honour to obey her's all I ask;

An honour to my valour justly due.

ASSUR.

Thy soul at something higher does aspire,

C 2

Thy

Thy aims presumptuous, fain thou would'st conceal.
Your love for AZEMA I know——

ARZACES.

'Tis true,
I prize that fair-one's heart above an empire ;
And my profound respect, my faithful love——

ASSUR.

You know not whom you thus insult, bold youth.
Would'st thou associate Sarmatia's race
With blood of heroes and of demi-gods ?
Dare not rash youth to carry to the queen
The insolent proposal now you make,
Else shall your rashness soon my vengeance feel.

ARZACES.

My soul could never yet by threats be scar'd,
This moment I will hasten to the queen.
Whatever rights and power you here may have,
You can't insult a soldier who has serv'd
The queen and empire, nay, has serv'd yourself.
This boldness may surprize you and displease ;
Who with presumption and with pride elate
Would make me bend and crouch beneath your yoke.

ASSUR.

E'er long rash youth I'll make thee know the price
With which audacious subjects are repaid.

ARZACES.

Tis what thou may'st be taught as well as I.

S C E N E

A TRAGEDY.

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S C E N E V.

Semiramis appears on the lower end of the stage, leaning upon her women: Otanes her confident advances towards Assur.

ASSUR, ARZACES, MITRANES.

OTANES to ARZACES.

Depart, Sir, for the queen, a prey to grief,
Shuns every eye, and chuses solitude;
Respect the anguish of her grieving soul.
Ye gods restore her to her peace of mind.

ARZACES.

Kind heaven with pity look upon her woe.

[Exit Arzaces.]

ASSUR to one of his Followers.

Let's quit the place, and each expedient try
To make the best of her inquietude.

[Semiramis advances to the front of the stage.]

OTANES to SEMIRAMIS.

Oh queen recall the vigour of your soul,
Let not your eyes with horror shun the light.

SEMIRAMIS.

When shall thy shades, oh death! enwrap these eyes;
These eyes which with unceasing tears o'erflow?

[She walks in agitation about the stage, and thinks she sees the ghost of Ninus.]

Ye yawning gulphs be clos'd, thou phantom dire,
Or cease to threaten or destroy at once:

ARZACES coming, when may I expect?

OTANES.

OTANES.

ARZACES, Madam, e'er the rising sun
Arriv'd and waits your pleasure now at court.

SEMIRAMIS.

That voice celestial, or infernal howl,
That adds new horror to the shades of night,
Apprizes me that when ARZACES comes,
My heart-felt pangs at length shall find an end.

OTANES.

Let then a gleam of joy dispel those woes,
Hope in the gods who come to your relief.

SEMIRAMIS.

ARZACES seems the messenger of joy :
Hope at his name revives within my soul,
And my crime weighs less heavy on my heart.

OTANES.

Banish it's image ever from your mind ;
Think of the glory of your better days,
Forget the happy, or unhappy hour
When that destructive union was dissolv'd.
NINUS excluding you from bed and throne,
Had in your ruin Babylon involv'd.
The earth and Babylon alike rejoice
That such a purpose did not take effect.
Your works and your exploits for fifteen years
Have been applauded and admir'd by men :
The barren desert you have fertile made,
The fierceness of the savage tam'd by laws :
Arts in our cities at your voice reviv'd :
These monuments, the wonders of the world,
The acclamations of this powerful state

Bear

A TRAGEDY.

15

Bear witness to your glory, and proclaim
Your worth aloud before the thrones divine.
In fine, had heaven with horror view'd the deed,
Had NINUS' death appear'd so great a crime,
Would ASSUR proudly here defy it's wrath?
The guilt of ASSUR far surpasses yours:
But tho' his hand prepar'd the deadly draught,
He lives secure, a stranger to your fears.

SEMIRAMIS.

Our station and our duties differ'd much,
My sacred tie adds horror to my crime.
My guilt's of such a dye, that I am forc'd
To give in evidence against myself.
I thought the gods incens'd at such a crime
Sufficiently had punish'd me: I thought
That my son's loss might have aton'd for all:
That all my useful labours, my success,
Lasting respect had to my crown procured.
But now this horrid phantom damps my heart,
Astonishing at once my eyes and ears.
Approaching slowly to the monument,
At distance I the fatal urn revere:
With trembling I invoke it; direful cries,
And piercing groans, in answer it returns;
My throbbing heart some great event forbodes,
Perhaps the hour of vengeance now draws nigh.

OTANES.

But is it sure that this infernal spectre
Comes from the dreary mansions of the dead?
When mortals think fate hovers o'er their heads,
A thousand phantoms scare their frightened souls:

Objects

Objects of fancy then they realize,
And start at the creation of the brain.

SEMIRAMIS.

These eyes have seen it, 'tis no vision vain,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed powers:
Sleep that on downy pinions fled my eyes,
Could not mislead my waking soul with dreams.
Whilst my cares kept me watching; near my bed
I heard a voice pronounce ARZACES' name.
With joy I heard his name: you know my heart,
My heart which bloody ASSUR's fierceness wounds.
When I behold the partner of my crime,
My startled conscience flying in my face
Upbraids me that I spotted it for him:
I shudder at his view, the deed that binds us
Rises in all its horrors to my soul.
I wish—but should I in my present grief,
By a new crime revenge the crime that's past,
I must oppose ARZACES to his pride,
T' enslave me he ambitiously aspires.
ARZACES fill'd my breast with peace—but then
Even in the moments that I tasted joy,
Sudden the messenger of death appear'd,
All smear'd with blood, and in his hand a sword
Gleam'd terrible—methinks I still behold him,
Still hear his voice, ah, wherefore does he come?
Comes he to punish me, or to defend?
Even then ARZACES at my court arriv'd,
And heaven then seem'd to promise me repose.
But still to care and anguish I'm a prey,
And peace is still a stranger to my soul.
I float 'twixt hope and terror, and my life

A TRAGEDY.

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Is now too great a burden to be borne.
 My present power, and all my glory past
 Give fresh affliction to my tortur'd soul.
 Still I with care my secret grief conceal'd,
 With shame my terrors cover'd me; I fear'd
 Of OROES the sage to ask advice.
 I thought that it would vilify the throne,
 Nor car'd to shew in presence of the gods,
 The queen in terror stand before a priest.
 But fear prevail'd in secret, and I sent
 Jove to consult where Libia's plains extend;
 As if the God who rules o'er heaven and earth,
 Had to those wilds remote, confin'd the truth!
 The god who dwells in that obscure recess
 My homage has receiv'd, and heard my fears;
 His altars with my incense oft have blaz'd,
 And with rich presents often have been heap'd;
 But oh, what presents can atone for crimes!

SCENE VI.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, and MITRANES.

MITRANES.

A priest from Memphis just arriv'd attends
 Your royal pleasure at the palace gates.

SEMIRAMIS.

The crisis of my fate is then at hand,
 Let's hence, and strive to hide from subjects eyes
 The trouble that degrades their hapless queen.
 Go bid ARZACES enter, and once more
 Repose to my afflicted heart restore.

D

ACT



ACT II. SCENE I.

ARZACES and AZEMA.

AZEMA.

TO thee, ARZACES, this vast empire owes
 It's lustre, and to thee I owe my freedom.
 When Scythia's sons, their losses to repair,
 Pour'd numerous on us from their wild retreats;
 When to their chains my fire expiring left me,
 You to their desarts bore vindictive thunder;
 You broke my bonds, and overthrew their host;
 My heart alone can recompence the favour.
 I'm yours, but love will sure destroy us both.
 Your open heart, alas! too fondly thought
 That in this court-respect, as in the field,
 Would wait on your exploits, and grace your name;
 That without danger you might be sincere;
 And act the lover's and the hero's part.
 ASSUR you brave, the tyrant you should know,
 Here he is, lord he menaces aloud,
 Remorse he from his fatal power disjoins;
 He is your rival, therefore dread his rage.

ARZACES.

What does the tyrant list his eyes to thee?

AZEMA.

And think you then his fierce relentless heart
 That hates all virtue, to no charm can yield?

That

That heart, to proud ambition's laws enslav'd,
 Knows tenderness, or can desire to please.
 As from Assyria's kings, I claim my birth,
 He by our union hopes to prop his right,
 And vindicate his title to the throne.
 Were NINIAS' self to whom his royal fire
 NINUS had destin'd me in infancy;
 Were the heir to this empire yet alive,
 And should he at my feet now lay his crown,
 I swear by love, and by yourself I swear
 I'd rather fly with you, than reign with him.
 The savage plains of Scythia, whose rude climes
 Resound thy name, would be a blest retreat.
 Those desarts where our love first took it's rise,
 Would in my eyes even Babylon outshine.
 Perhaps the tyrant whom our love offends
 Will not confine his rage to that revenge.
 Replete with hellish malice in his soul,
 His harden'd heart can harbour ev'ry crime,
 Your reputation has his envy rais'd,
 He fears and hates you—

ARZACES.

—And I hate him too.

Fear him I cannot, whilst by you belov'd.
 Secure in that I brave his utmost hate.
 Between us two, the queen a ballance holds,
 Admission to her presence soon I gain'd,
 And she receiv'd me with humanity,
 Equal to the insulting ASSUR's pride.
 Before her awful throne I kneel'd, she rais'd
 And call'd me the support of Babylon.
 Thus was I prais'd by her, who oft to kings,

D 2

Whom

Whom by her arms she vanquish'd, laws prescrib'd.
 For me, she from that envied height descended,
 Which to the royal dignity she ow'd,
 Struck with her condescension I admir'd,
 And thought her equal to the gods themselves.

AZEMA.

The menaces of ASSUR will be vain
 If once our cause is by the queen espous'd.

ARZACES.

Fill'd with a noble boldness, I prepar'd
 To lay before her my aspiring love,
 Approv'd by you, oppos'd by haughty ASSUR.
 Just then a priest of Egypt from the shrine
 Of Ammon brought the answer of the god.
 She open'd the decree with trembling hands,
 Then with attention, fix'd on me her eyes,
 Some tears she dropp'd, then starting suddenly,
 With anguish overwhelm'd she left the place.
 'Tis said her soul's a victor to despair,
 And that the vengeance of the gods pursu'd her.
 My heart weeps blood to see her thus, can heaven
 That has protected her for fifteen years,
 Now persecute her with vindictive rage?
 What has she done, and how provok'd the gods?

AZEMA.

The public talk is now of omens dire,
 Of angry ghosts, and of celestial wrath.
 SEMIRAMIS to anxious care a prey,
 For some time since neglects the government;
 And much I fear'd, lest ASSUR should have seiz'd
 The helm, forsaken by her feeble hand.
 But soon the awful presence of the queen

Dispell'd

A TRAGEDY.

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Dispell'd this trouble, and our peace restor'd.
If I know aught of courts, the haughty ASSUR
In secret is detested by the queen;
Their hate is mutual, but some hidden cause
Restrains it, nor permits to take effect.
Oft at his name I've seen the queen incens'd;
Her countenance has oft betray'd her mind,
Resentment seem'd to have possess'd her heart;
But courts to change are subject, and a day
Can there produce a revolution strange.
Return and speak with her——

ARZACES.

I go, but now
I know not if I can procure admittance.

AZEMA.

I'll second your design with all my power,
Your love is all my glory, and my pride:
To the queen's greatness all mortals bow,
And let the east respect and fear her name.
I will not envy her whilst lov'd by you:
Be her's the world, and mine ARZACES' heart.
Hence, ASSUR comes——

ARZACES.

——The villain! at his name
With honest rage my startled soul recoils.

SCENE

S C E N E II.

ASSUR, ARZACES, AZEMA.

ASSUR to ARZACES.

With marks of honour you have been receiv'd,
 Honour which kings have wish'd for, but in vain,
 In secret with the queen you have conferr'd,
 But know, ARZACES, your aspiring claim
 Insults the throne, my honour, and the queen's,
 Know AZEMA was destin'd for my bride,
 To NINIAS she was offer'd, and the sons
 Of kings alone are worthy such a match,
 The princes right is now devolved on me;
 And ASSUR stands the nearest to the throne.
 Say, has the queen appriz'd you of the risk
 To which presumption must expose your life?
 That no respect can from my mind efface
 The insolence of your audacious love,

ARZACES.

Respect, I know, is due to regal power,
 And tho' my soul is free from abject fear,
 Due deference to your rank I'll always pay.
 Your claim to AZEMA depends upon
 Your line illustrious, which from BELUS springs,
 Your private int'rest, and the public good,
 Seem equally to call for such an union.
 Against these titles I shall one oppose,
 Which must in reason's eye outweigh them both;
 I love the princess, and this arm, my lord,
 Her life protect'd, and her cause reveng'd,

And

A TRAGEDY.

23

And were I prone, like you, to boast my deeds,¹
I might assert, that I've sustain'd her throne.
I go with zeal, her order to fulfil;
The queen and she alone my duty claim.
The state, perhaps, may groan beneath your power,
For monarchs often are the scourge of God;
But know, you're much deceiv'd if you suppose
ARZACES in the number of your slaves.

ASSUR.

Vengeance will soon o'ertake and quell thy pride.

S C E N E III.

ASSUR, AZEMA.

ASSUR.

This insolence can be no longer borne,
But may I freely now explain myself
Upon a subject that deserves your ear.

AZEMA.

Declare it, for I listen——

ASSUR.

Asia soon

Shall see us both with envy'd greatness shine,
Inferior interests are below our care,
To regulate the world must be our task.
SEMIRAMIS' her greatness has surviv'd,
And heaven has humbled her aspiring soul;
That star which long has dazzl'd mortal sight,¹
Now sets and loses all it's former lustre.
The public murmurs, Babylon aloud
Demands an heir to prop the sinking throne.
Let this suffice—Love should not give us kings;

Not

Not but your beauties strike my ravish'd eye,
 I feel the power of all your heav'nly charms.
 But sure, the general welfare of the state
 Should not depend upon a look or smile.
 A nobler sentiment should here prevail.
 From the same race we both derive our birth,
 We must unite or else the world is lost.
 These words, perhaps, may shock your tender youth,
 But I address the heroes and the kings,
 The demi-gods from whom you are descended.
 Long has a woman trampled on their greatness,
 'Tis time you should assert your royal birth,
 And make the world forget SEMIRAMIS.

AZEMA.

Be mine the care to vindicate my birth,
 But henceforth name ARZACES with respect.
 SEMIRAMIS is mistress of my fate,
 And 'tis my glory to obey her will.

SCENE IV.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

ASSUR.

Gods! must the purpose of my soul be cross'd?
 Shall then a wayward child oppose my will?
 Say, has success attended your design?
 And can you by your secret practices
 Light up sedition's torch through the land?

CEDAR.

My hopes are great—the people now begin
 To shake off their respect—SEMIRAMIS

No

No longer is the object of their dread.
 All loudly call for a successor now,
 And all who love their country, or who boast
 Of public spirit, fix on you their choice.

ASSUR.

Must then ambition still produce new cares !
 Have I for this slain NINUS and his son ?
 Must I for ever languish—never reach
 That place to which my daring soul aspires ?
 The queen depriv'd her spouse of life—my rage
 Surpass'd her fury, and I slew her son.
 NINIAS, who stood between me and the throne,
 In secret was cut off by my command.
 In vain, I try'd each art to win the queen ;
 In vain, I hop'd to gain her youthful soul
 By all the power of flattery and persuasion.
 Her haughty soul was proof against my wiles ;
 And to the empire of the world aspir'd.
 Worthy she seem'd to rule the world ; I own
 Her merit, tho' I've suffer'd her disdain.
 I've seen her hold the reins of government,
 And with superior genius rule the realm,
 Murmurs appease, and insurrections quell ;
 Armies direct, and regulate the state.
 That art which laws to fame itself prescribes,
 Made mankind to her empire homage pay.
 The universe with awe beholds her still :
 The powerful charm of beauty too, conspir'd
 To make her laws respected thro' the world ;
 And when I to oppose her power presum'd,
 My friends were struck with awe, and dropt their arms.
 But times are chang'd ; her greatness now declines,

E

Her

Her genius now is check'd by adverse fate.
 Imaginary fears distract her soul;
 Weakly to lying priests she lends an ear,
 And Egypt's superstitions she adores.
 Her incense and her vows fatigue the gods;
 Like other mortals now she learns to fear.
 SEMIRAMIS must yield to adverse fate,
 Must to my wishes yield your charms divine,
 Or by refusing, make the realm rebel.
 Dangers arise on ev'ry side around her,
 But my aspiring soul perhaps presumes
 Too much—perhaps you will not hear my vows.

CEDAR.

If the queen yields, and names you her successor,
 Wherefore should diffidence invade your soul?
 Your union with the beauteous AZEMA
 Is loudly call'd for by the state—the realm
 Can never hope to prosper till you reign.

ASSUR.

With me alone the princess should be match'd,
 But wherefore is ARZACES call'd to court?
 Why does SEMIRAMIS support his pride?
 I would have punish'd him—her hand retains
 My lifted arm, nor lets me wreak revenge.
 Tho' I'm a prince, no subjects own my reign,
 I'm minister, but destitute of power,
 Hemm'd round with glory I dependent live:
 At once a mistress, an audacious youth,
 And lying priests conspire against my peace:
 SEMIRAMIS distrusts me, and her hate
 Scarcely conceals, but still my presence flies;

But

But let the ungrateful queen beware, least I,
Least her accomplice should revenge her crimes.

[He prepares to go out.]

S C E N E V.

ASSUR, OTANES, CEDAR.

OTANES.

My lord, the queen commands you to attend,
With you she means in secret to confer,

ASSUR.

Her secret orders I'll with care obey,

OTANES, say, I wait her royal will.

S C E N E VI.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

ASSUR.

This sudden change what cause may have produc'd?
These three months past I've borne her deadly hate;
Her eyes have still with horror shun'd my sight,
She has not deign'd to speak with me alone:
Our conversations which disgusted her
Were interrupted by her sudden fears,
And oft she heard with inattentive ear:
What would she tell me, what desire to learn?
The queen approaches, go and wait my coming.

E

SCENE

S C E N E VII.

SEMIRAMIS, ASSUR.

SEMIRAMIS.

It's time, my lord, I should explain my heart,
 Which long in secret has devour'd it's grief.
 My reign, perhaps, has not inglorious been :
 Asia, perhaps, and Babylon may place
 SEMIRAMIS amongst their greatest kings.
 Your hands have long sustain'd the empire's weight ;
 I've liv'd victorious, absolute, ador'd,
 With incense to my power each altar blaz'd :
 Thus too, secure and free from ev'ry fear,
 I soon forgot to what I ow'd my state,
 By greatness blinded I forgot the gods :
 The gods their justice now display ; I yield ;
 My power which long seem'd founded on a rock,
 Now asks a prop, and totters to its fall.

ASSUR.

Madam, 'tis yours to finish your great work,
 And in the womb of time foresee events.
 What clouds can overcast so bright a fame ?
 All earth obeys, then wherefore fear the gods ?

SEMIRAMIS.

In yonder urn reposes NINUS' dust,
 And do you ask the subject of my fear ?

ASSUR.

To find that you remember NINUS reign'd,
 With a just indignation fills my soul.

Can

Can you the anger of his manes fear,
 Who fifteen years has slept in silent death?
 E'er this, they had wreak'd their vengeance on your head
 Had they the power, from the oblivious shades.
 Raise not his ghost: my mind recoils appall'd,
 And sympathizing dread pervades my breast.
 No longer to false oracles repair,
 A heart resolv'd propitiates the gods.
 Must this strange phantom you have seen to-day,
 By fears begot, still to new fears give birth?
 No portents can affright th' undaunted soul:
 These are the bugbears of the populace,
 By fraud invented—by the great despis'd;
 But if some nobler, some more solid view
 That soul enlightens, to vain fears a prey:
 If NINUS' race you would eternalize,
 If that high rank by AZEMA is claim'd—

SEMIRAMIS.

On that account I come—the oracles,
 And Babylon at once demand an heir.
 My scepter's weight requires another hand,
 And soon both heaven and earth shall be obey'd.
 ASSUR, you know that my ambitious soul
 Had made a vow never to share the throne,
 Whom I would marry, long I kept conceal'd:
 When in my youth the people's voice, that voice
 By many thought to be the voice of God,
 Press'd me to give new sovereigns to the world:
 If any to that honour might pretend,
 'Twas due to you, and you alone—but 'midst
 Your hopes you surely could not but have known

How

How much SEMIRAMIS disdain'd a lord,
 I shun'd this fatal tye, but still I made you
 Second on earth in glory, and in power.
 My lord, I without pride, may sure affirm
 You should have been contented with that rank,
 Heaven now declares itself and I obey,
 Attentive hear its will, my orders mark.
 "The empire shall renew its ancient lustre,
 "When kindling Hy nen's torch anew: oh! queen,
 "Unhappy mother, and too cruel wife,
 "You have aton'd the murder'd NINUS' ghost."
 The will divine is in these words explain'd,
 I know your views, I know your policy,
 You mean to form a party in the state:
 The blood you spring from, you'd against me turn,
 A king from AZEMA and you might rise;
 You seek this marriage, she perhaps consents,
 But 'tis not my design your rights should blend,
 And by uniting, arm against my own;
 Such is my fix'd, irrevocable will.
 Judge if the god, who persecutes my peace,
 Has quite depriv'd my senses of their vigour;
 From these my words know you SEMIRAMIS?
 Cannot I still my dignity sustain?
 To Babylon I soon will give a lord;
 But whoso'er is honour'd with my choice,
 Think not when married, I will cease to reign,
 Assemble straight the princes, and the magi,
 My liberty and empire to bestow
 Is the most solemn act of regal power.
 Let all my subjects wait my will in silence.
 My fate grows bright on this auspicious day,

An

A T R A G E D Y.

31

And wrath divine now seems almost appeas'd ;
But by repentance it must be disarm'd ;
Believe me, that remorse which you despise,
Is all the virtue criminals can boast :
Timid and weak you think me, know proud man,
Those that are guilty, are the truly weak.
Such fear is no dishonour to a crown,
Kings it becomes, and you should learn to fear ;
I'll shew you by example, 'tis not base
Humbly to bow before the angry gods.

S C E N E VIII.

A S S U R, *solus.*

What do I hear ! what strange designs are these !
Does fear or artifice inspire her breast ?
Thinks she by yielding, to secure her power ?
Would she to thwart me, join her fate to mine ?
I must no more to AZEMA pretend ;
I then shall be the consort of the queen.
What all my cares, and what our common crimes,
What all the homage I have paid her charms,
What my intrigues could never yet effect,
An oracle, a dream has brought about !
What unknown power o'er human kind presides !
Yet I'm uncertain, let me see the queen,
Her resolution seems precipitate,
A thousand cares her anxious brow displays,
And sudden changes should suspicion raise.

A C T



ACT III. SCENE I.

The theatre represents an apartment in the palace.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

SEMIRAMIS.

WHO wou'd have thought, OTANES, that the
gods

Prepar'd to view me with propitious eyes?

And that they terrified but to forgive!

Destruction's gulph is by their mercy clos'd,

Th' uplifted thunder-bolt they have laid down:

ARZACES they have brought, have chang'd my fate;

They invite me to a second vow, which may

Atone those crimes which have dissolv'd the first:

No, I no longer doubt their providence,

My heart implicitly obeys their laws.

ARZACES I obey—I see that you

Were born to reign o'er me and o'er the world.

OTANES.

ARZACES, Madam?

SEMIRAMIS.

—In the Scythian plains

When vanquish'd Asia yielded to my power,

This hero, by his father's side he fought,

Environ'd round with captives, and with slain,

Offer'd me blushing, with victorious hands,

The

The bloody spoils of vanquish'd enemies :
 At seeing him emotion fill'd my heart,
 To him it seem'd by instinct to incline ;
 My faculties were by some charm o'erpower'd,
 I all the world despis'd, compar'd to him.
 The jealous ASSUR kept his eyes upon me ;
 He shrunk to hear ARZACES' name pronounc'd.
 But still my mind was fill'd with his idea,
 Before the hand divine had trac'd it there,
 Before that voice which struck my soul with awe,
 Directed me to hope in him alone.

OTANES.

Can then that mighty spirit stoop so low,
 That spirit which with scorn rejected kings
 As lovers, but has rank'd them with her slaves.
 You priz'd but meanly that transcendent grace,
 Which glory has reflected on the throne :
 And whilst the world your potent eyes ador'd,
 Their triumph, you with unconcern beheld,
 And does your heart now feel the charm of love ?
 Can sentiments so tender then succeed,
 To all the torments you have felt to-day ?

SEMIRAMIS.

No, 'tis not love that o'er my heart prevails,
 I am not weakly, by my eyes subdu'd.
 Think not I can so far forget my rank,
 Or be seduc'd so far by outward charms,
 As on them to bestow the price of worth.
 Higher by far I deem my sentiments.
 Should the soft passion touch afflicted breasts ?
 And should not wretches be exempt from love ?
 A mother's tenderness once fill'd my breast ;

F

Not

Not long these hap'ess arms contain'd the child;
 Of my first hope I quickly was bereft,
 To anguish thus become a constant prey,
 Possess'd of nothing that my soul could love:
 I all the emptiness of grandeur felt,
 The farce of state then shunning, and myself,
 I sought repose in monuments of art,
 Amusements of a soul that flies from thought.
 Repose a stranger long at length returns,
 A secret joy pervades my wond'ring mind;
 My spouse, my son, the world, my glory, all
 At once by my ARZACES are supplied.
 What incense do I owe thy sacred shrine
 Oh power, who mak'st me re-assume the yoke?
 That yoke, which formerly has prov'd my bane,
 And mak'st me feel a flame by you inspir'd.

OTANES.

But do you not foresee what furious rage
 Will tear the breast of ASSUR at the news?
 His hopes are by the public voice confirm'd,
 The people think him only, worthy of you:
 From his resentment, dire effects may spring.

SEMIRAMIS,

I have explain'd myself, I fear him not:
 Full fifteen years I've known to check his pride,
 The rank of subject he has never pass'd;
 To his ambition, object of distrust,
 Bounds I prescrib'd, and held him in respect:
 I then reign'd single. If my feeble hand
 Could bridle thus his fierce aspiring soul,
 How weak must his intrigues, how weak his rage
 Prove, when I'm united with ARZACES?

Sure

A TRAGEDY.

35

Sure NINIUS satisfied with my remorse,
 To press this marriage rises from the grave.
 His sacred shade already injur'd much,
 Against me might with reason be incens'd;
 Should he at once behold his bed defil'd,
 And throne usurp'd by his fell murderer.
 'Tis this that calls him from the hallow'd vault;
 The oracle, and NINUS' ghost agree;
 No longer do I dread the priest austere,
 I've sent for him to hear my royal will;
 I now expect him.

OTANES.

—So rever'd a name,
 His sacred character will back your choice.

SEMIRAMIS.

His voice will to my bosom peace restore.

OTANES,

He comes.

S C E N E II.

SEMIRAMIS, OROES.

SEMIRAMIS.

Oh! thou the august successor
 Of the fam'd founder of the magian sect,
 To name a king I now prepare; 'tis yours
 With holy hands to crown his sacred head.
 Are all things ready for the solemn rite?

OROES.

The princes and the magi all attend;
 My duty 'tis t'obey the royal will;

F 2

We

We judge not monarchs, that belongs alone
To the just gods—

SEMIRAMIS.

By this ambiguous phrase,
You seem my present purpose to condemn.

OROES.

Most earnestly I pray the righteous gods
To prosper your design, to me unknown.

SEMIRAMIS.

You who interpret heaven's high will, declare
These signs ; preface they any dire event ?
My eyes have seen a ghost, perhaps a god ;
Sudden into the womb of earth he plung'd.
What power divine has broke the eternal bound
Which separated earth from hell below ?
Wherefore do mortals fate's decree infringe
From death's pale mansions, wherefore do they rise ?

OROES.

Sometimes the will divine suspends that law
Itself establish'd before time began :
The course of nature sometimes it inverts,
Kings to instruct and terrify the earth.

SEMIRAMIS.

A sacrifice Ammon's oracle requires.

OROES.

It shall have one——

SEMIRAMIS.

——Eternal justice hear ;
You who read all the secrets of my heart,
Make it no more a prey to direful pangs ;
Blot from your mem'ry the dire idea
Of my first marriage, and of all its horrors.

To

A TRAGEDY.

37

To OROES, who was preparing to retire.

Return——

— OROES.

—— I fear'd my presence might disturb.

SEMIRAMIS.

This morn did not ARZACES offer gifts
Upon the altars of th' immortal gods?

OROES.

He did; his offerings to the gods are dear.

SEMIRAMIS.

These cheering words convey a ray of hope.
May I depend on happiness with him?

OROES.

ARZACES is the empire's noblest prop;
The gods who gave his greatness are his guides.

SEMIRAMIS.

The happy presage I accept with joy;
Returning hope with transport fills my heart.
Let clouds of smoke from fragrant censers roll;
Go forth, and with your magi's bands august,
The favour of the gracious heavens implore
On this important marriage, this just choice:
And may this state's eternal destiny
At once grow bright, and with new splendor shine!

SCENE

S C E N E III.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

SEMIRAMIS.

Thus my design the will of heaven awards,
 And with assent divine confirms my choice.
 How will ARZACES be surpriz'd to see
 A kingly scepter offer'd to his hand?
 How will the haughty ASSUR's pride be humbled!
 When by a word I make his rival lord:
 How grateful must he be for such a gift!
 In marrying him I bring the world as dow'r.
 My glory is compleat, my bliss extreme.

S C E N E IV.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, MITRANES, *and an Officer of
the palace.*

OTANES.

ARZACES, Madam, urgently requests
 Admittance to your presence—inward grief
 Preys on his heart—refuse him not that grace.

SEMIRAMIS.

And can ARZACES grieve whilst I am near?
 'Twas he alone that eas'd me of my sorrows:
 Without delay admit him—my whole heart
 Is his, and to it he may claim a right.
 You manes whom I dread, you guardian gods,
 Gods of Assyria, NINUS, and my son,

Unite

A TRAGEDY.

39

Unite in the protection of ARZACES.
But wherefore do I shudder at his view ?

S C E N E V.

SEMIRAMIS, ARZACES.

ARZACES.

My life is to thy use devoted, queen,
I in your cause, would every drop of blood
With joy and transport shed, nor ask reward.
My fire enjoy'd his share of warlike fame,
Like a brave soldier, at your army's head
He dy'd, and left to his unhappy son
The best inheritance, a good example.
I should not have presum'd thus to recall
His deeds to your remembrance—were it not
That from the glory of the fire alone,
The son, who bends before your sacred knees,
Can hope t' obtain the favour he implores.
I own my rashness, and I own the crime
Of forming wishes which may seem too bold ;
I even fear t' offend you whilst I serve.

SEMIRAMIS.

What you offend me ?—oh, the fear is vain.

ARZACES.

Your state you give, you give your royal hand.
My scruples and my fears I must suppress,
Although your choice imports so much to all.
With prostrate front I must in silence wait,
With crowds of kings, a king to reign o'er all.
But ASSUR haughtily this honour claims ;

With

With joy elate, and of success secure :
 The people points him out as of your race !
 But I will own my soul disdains to stoop ;
 I can't adore the man I lately brav'd,
 Nor can I bear to crouch beneath his pride.
 Oh queen ! permit me therefore to retire
 To climes remote, tho' loth to quit your presence.

SEMIRAMIS.

What words are these ? why would you fly from hence !
 Do you fear ASSUR ?

ARZACES.

No, this daring heart
 Your anger fears, and knows no fear beside.
 Perhaps you know how high my love aspires ;
 Perhaps may thwart my too aspiring vows.
 I tremble——

SEMIRAMIS.

—Hope rather, for you soon will be convinc'd
 That ASSUR was not born to be your king.

ARZACES.

Then I will own, 'twould shock me to behold
 ASSUR the partner of your bed and throne :
 But should he miss his aim, is AZEMA
 Doom'd to fall victim to the tyrant's love ?
 Excuse my warmth, it springs from zeal alone ;
 Do you not fear his dark, ambitious aims ?
 To NINIAS, AZEMA was once betroth'd,
 From the same blood ASSUR derives his birth :
 I'm but a subject—yet against his claim—

SEMIRAMIS.

Subjects like you can best support a throne.
 Your sentiments I know ; your noble soul

Inspir'd

A TRAGEDY.

41

Inspir'd by love, no other motive knows :
You know my interests ; I to your hands
Commit them, and expect from you support.
Assur and Azema shall ne'er unite ;
I well foresee the danger of their match ;
His dark designs shall all abortive prove.

ARZACES.

Since then you know my love ; since you have read
The secret wish and purpose of my heart——

Enter AZEMA with precipitation.

AZEMA.

Thus prostrate at your feet——

SEMIRAMIS.

——Rise, princess rise,
Whate'er my choice, you ever here shall find
A treatment worthy of your ancestors :
I hop'd you would have been my NINIAS' bride,
And still I see you with a mother's eye.
Come take your places ; now the lords and magi
Assemble to bear witness to my choice.

To ARZACES.

Stand near the throne, oh, thou its best support !

G

SCENE

S C E N E VI.

Scene changes from the apartment of Semiramis, to a large salon magnificently adorned. Many officers all bearing the marks of their several dignities, stand upon steps raised above each other. A throne is placed in the midst of the salon: the Satrapes stand by it. The High-Priest enters with the Magi; he stands between Assur and Arzaces. The Queen is seen in the middle, with Azema and her women. Guards stand at the bottom of the salon.

OROES.

Princes and magi, lords and warriors,
By order of the queen assembled here,
To you our god's decrees shall be reveal'd :
Our state's, their care, and now the day is come
Which they have destin'd for some great event.
Whoever is elected by the queen
To share her throne and bed, and rule the state ;
'Tis ours t'obey, and to revere her choice.
The vows and homage which to kings we owe,
I in the name of all the magi pay ;
I pray for them, and for the public good.
May these auspicious, these triumphant days
Never assume the dusky hue of grief ;
Never, oh, never may these songs of joy
Be chang'd into the plaintive sound of woe.

AZEMA.

Pontiff and lords, a king is to be nam'd ;
I only am affected by the choice :

Bat

But born a subject, I am a subject still;
 I the queen's will implicitly obey.
 No ominous conjecture on th' event
 I'll cast, but by example teach submission.

ASSUR.

Whatever the high will of heaven decides,
 Be now the public good our chiefest care:
 Let's swear both by the throne, and by the queen,
 To pay a blind submission to her choice,
 And without murmuring obey her will.

ARZACES.

I swear it, and this arm, this heart that pays
 Respect to her, next to the gods themselves;
 This blood which oft I've shed even in her fight,
 To my new master here I do devote,
 With the same zeal which warm'd me in her cause.

HIGH-PRIEST.

I wait the will of heaven, and of the queen.

SEMIRAMIS.

My subjects, lend me an attentive ear.

[She seats herself upon the throne.]

Azema, Assur, the High-Priest and Arzaces having
 taken their places, she continues.

If with my glory struck, th' admiring world
 Full fifteen years the scepter has rever'd,
 Even in a female hand, by ancient laws
 Destin'd to bear the distaff and obey:
 If I have borne this empire's mighty weight

G 2

With

With a success that has surpriz'd mankind;
 I'll share it now the better to support,
 To spread it's glory to remotest times;
 T' obey the gods whose will irrevocable,
 Humbles this fierce, this once undaunted heart.
 One son they took from me; may they bestow
 Sons worthy to succeed to such a power :
 Sons that may tread the paths I had mark'd out,
 And equal all the grandeur of my reign !
 I might have chosen a scepter'd king, but they
 Whose states surround my own, are all my foes,
 Or else subdu'd already by my arms;
 My crown is not for such—I higher prize
 My subjects of high rank, than kings whom I,
 Or even they themselves have oft subdu'd.
 If Belus, born a subject, wore the crown,
 He ow'd it to the people, to himself;
 I by a right like his, my scepter hold.
 The wide extended regions I command,
 Surpass by far the realms possess'd by him;
 I have compleated what he but began.
 States by the means that form them are sustain'd.
 A hero of high worth this empire claims,
 Deserving of such subjects: may I add,
 Deserving of the hand that gives the crown.
 The gods I have consulted, search'd the laws,
 Weigh'd the state's int'rest, and the world's at once;
 The fate of mankind on my choice depends;
 Revere the hero who becomes your king:
 In him behold reviv'd my princely race.

ARZACES

A TRAGEDY.

45

ARZACES is the hero I elect.

[She descends from the throne, and all present rise up.]

AZEMA.

ARZACES ! oh, perfidious man !——

ASSUR.

——Oh, rage ?

ARZACES to AZEMA.

Ah, think not——

OROES.

——Gracious gods assist us now.

SEMIRAMIS advances to the front of the stage, and addresses the Magi.

Oh you who sanctify the purest flames——

Approach——our solemn promises confirm,

NINUS and NINUS' son are now restor'd.

[Claps of thunder are heard, and the tomb appears to shake.]

OROES.

In this dread hour protect us gracious gods.

SEMIRAMIS.

Why does heaven roll it's thunder o'er our heads ?

Is good or ill foreboded by the sound ?

Pardon me gods in favour of ARZACES !

Lo ! the tomb opens——see he comes——I die !——

[The ghost of Ninus rises from the monument.]

ASSUR.

The ghost of NINUS ! can it be, ye gods !

ARZACES.

Oh speak thou awful shade, what must we do ?

ASSUR.

ASSUR.

Speak.

SEMIRAMIS.

Oh com'st thou to destroy, or to forgive?
Thy bed and scepter I have just bestow'd;
Judge if this hero's worthy of your place.
Your answer shall determine me——

The ghost addresses himself to ARZACES.

——ARZACES,

Thou shalt ascend the throne, but there are crimes
Which first thy sword must expiate by blood.
Thy arm to NINUS' dust shall sacrifice
Even in his tomb—serve both the son and fire;
Thy fire remember—listen to the priest.

ARZACES.

Oh gracious form—oh demi-god rever'd,
Whose powerful influence animates these climes,
Thy fight with courage fills me, not with dread.
Thy tomb I'll enter, should I risk my life.
Conclude, whom would'st thou that I sacrifice?

[The ghost goes towards the door of the monument.]

He flies us, he departs——

SEMIRAMIS.

——Oh injur'd shade!

Permit me to embrace thy sacred knees,
And let my sorrow——

The ghost speaks at the door of the monument.

——Hold, respect my dust;

At a fit season we again shall meet.

[The ghost enters and the monument shuts.]

ASSUR.

A T R A G E D Y.

67

ASSUR.

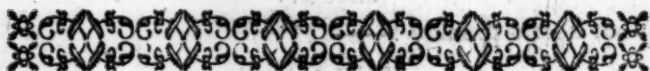
What horrid prodigy !——

SEMIRAMIS.

——My people follow,
Enter the temple, lay aside your fears ;
This injur'd ghost at length may be appeas'd,
It has declar'd in favour of ARZACES,
And therefore will not prove to me severe.
Now to the gods, whom monarchs must obey,
Let us the tribute of our homage pay.



A C T



ACT IV. SCENE I.

The Scene represents the Porch of the Temple.

ARZACES, AZEMA.

ARZACES.

AH, do not aggravate my weight of woe,
This oracle with horror fills my soul.
Shock'd nature teems with signs and portents dire :
Must cruel heaven deprive me of your heart?

AZEMA.

Cease perjur'd man, nor add to what I feel
By talking of thy love ; 'twas falshood all.
I combat not the queen who gives her crown,
The speaking dead, nor thy perfidious heart :
By various prodigies my soul appall'd,
Finds none that equal thy inconstancy.
Compleat thy work, propitiate NINUS' ghost,
By me begin thy horrid sacrifice ,
Strike here ungrateful man——

ARZACES.

——My wounded heart
Was not against this cruel stroke prepar'd.
Inhuman maid, judge from my grief profound
Whether this heart prefers you to a throne ;
If I have brav'd the dangers of the field,
And fame acquir'd, it was for you alone :

In

In all my labours, all my hardy deeds,
 To merit you was my ambition's height.
 SEMIRAMIS is dear to me, I own,
 Your praises of her have conspir'd with mine:
 We thought her both a guardian power, whose care
 Kindly protected our mysterious love.
 Perhaps the gods who dwell in bowers of bliss,
 Require such holy homage, such pure love.
 When the queen chose me, judge of my surprize,
 Think of the precipice that gapes before us:
 Hear my fate to the end——

AZEMA.

——I know it all.

ARZACES.

I was not born for empire nor for thee.
 This son I am to serve is NINIAS' self,
 The son of NINUS, and his only heir——

AZEMA.

Proceed——

ARZACES.

With whom, an infant,
 You were united by the marriage-tye,
 At once my monarch and my rival born——

AZEMA.

NINIAS——

ARZACES.

——He lives, and shortly will appear.

AZEMA.

NINIAS! just heaven! the queen believ'd him dead.

ARZACES.

The queen deceiv'd, long wept a son who lives.

H

AZEMA.

AZEMA.

NINIAS then lives——

ARZACES.

——'Tis kept a secret still

Deep in the temple, from the queen conceal'd.

AZEMA.

But NINUS crowns you and his widow's yours.

ARZACES.

But your spouse his son ; his son's my king,
And I must serve him. Fatal oracle !

AZEMA.

Love speaks, I'm satisfy'd, and ask no more ;

His orders from obscurity are free :

That is the only oracle I'll hear.

Since NINIAS then is living let him come :

Her promise let his mother here renew,

And let his father, from the grave return'd,

Th' engagements of our infancy confirm ;

Let mighty NINIAS, thy king and rival,

Feel all the love that should inspire thy breast ;

Come, and thou shalt behold his love despis'd,

Himself, his throne, his love, I scorn them all.

But where is NINIAS ? say, what mystery

Can from the mother keep her son conceal'd ?

But let him come ; he nor the queen herself,

No, nor the ghost sent forth from gaping Hell,

Nor shall a general wreck of nature force

This constant heart to violate its faith.

Do you, ARZACES, well consult yourself ;

And strive to copy after my example.

But what are then these crimes, which hell enrag'd,

Which Ninus' ghost command to be aton'd ?

No

A TRAGEDY.

51

No, cruel ARZACES, if you break your vows,
No crime how black foe'r can equal yours.
Th' interpreter of fate I see arise,
Its laws to dictate from his dark retreat:
The hapless passion which you violate
Must not prevent you to consult the gods,
Go, hear the menacing decrees of Ninus;
My fate on thee depends, thine on the gods.

Exit Arzaces.

ARZACES.

I'm thine, and only thine; stay, cruel, stay:
Oh mixture strange of horror and of bliss!
Strange destinies which with each other jar!

S C E N E II.

Arzaces, Oroes, followed by the Magi.

OROES to ARZACES.

To yon deep solitude let us retire.
What sharp afflictions pierce your soul, I know;
For new assault of trouble stand prepar'd.

To the Magi

The diadem of sacred majesty
Bring me, you Magi——take that sword and letter.

[The Magi obeys the orders of the High Priest.]

ARZACES.

Save me, my father, from the pit that yawns
Under my feet——draw back that gloomy veil.

OROES.

The veil will quickly fall, my son, the hour
Is come when NINUS in his dark retreat

H 2

Expects

Expects you should his cries appease—'tis yours
To make an off'ring to his injur'd ghost.

ARZACES.

What order's this? what off'ring is requir'd?
Whilst Ninias lives should I revenge his fire?
Let him approach, my arm shall aid my king.

OROES.

The order giv'n implicitly obey,
Within an hour to Ninus tomb repair,
[He gives the diadem and the sword to Arzaces.
Arm'd with this sacred sword, thy temples bound
With the same diadem the monarch wore,
That diadem which you yourself have brought,

ARZACES,

The diadem of NINUS?

OROES.

So his shade

Commands you to attend him at his tomb,
Where you must make a bloody sacrifice.
Strike boldly, give the vengeance he requires;
The victim will be there; I've said enough.
The gods will to the tomb conduct its steps.

ARZACES.

Let them command, my blood I will not spare.
But NINIAS, Sir, you do not speak of him;
You do not tell me how his fire himself
Would give me both his wife and diadem.

OROES.

Give you his wife! give you SEMIRAMIS!
Know then the hour I promis'd is arriv'd;
Know your own fate, that impious woman know—

ARZACES.

ARZACES.

Oh heavens —

OROES.

— her husband she depriv'd of life.

ARZACES.

What did the queen! —

OROES.

— The villain ASSUR gave

With his detested hand the pois'nous draught,

ARZACES, *after a short pause.*

No bloody act in ASSUR can seem strange :

But how can I believe a wife, a queen,

Darling of nations, and the monarch's boast,

Could e'er be guilty of so foul a deed !

Can so much merit dwell with such a crime ?

OROES.

This doubt, ARZACES, shews a soul sublime ;

But now I nothing must extenuate :

Each moment of this day shall be reveal'd

A secret to make frighted nature start :

E'en now she at your heart-strings tugs ; her voice,

Her pow'rful cries you hear, and groan oppress'd.

Wonder not if indignant NINUS leaves

His tomb to visit this polluted court :

He comes to break a knot by furies tied,

And bring unpunish'd villainy to light :

He comes from incest to preserve his son.

E'en now he waits your coming, know your fire ;

The queen's your mother ; NINIAS is your name,

ARZACES.

So many mortal wounds at once receiv'd

My

My pow'rs o'erwhelm, and round me hovers death!
And am I then SEMIRAMIS's son?

OROES.

Do you still doubt? know NINUS at his death
Convinc'd that poison rankled in his veins,
That you were likewise menac'd with its rage,
The venom preying on the springs of life,
Dying remov'd you from this impious court.
ASSUR compleating his fell crimes on you,
Poison'd the son, the mother to espouse.
The royal race extinct, he thought the throne
Must to perfidious boldness be a prey;
And whilst the palace wept your loss suppos'd,
PHRADATES, fav'd you from the jaws of death.
Those pow'rful simples which in Persia's plains
The sun with warmth benign brings forth, prepar'd
With care by sage PHRADATES' healing art,
Chas'd from your veins the poison's virulence.
The place of his lost son you long supply'd;
ARZACES was the name you always bore.
PHRADATES waited still some happy change:
The God who judges kings wills otherwise.
The truth descends from heav'n in terrors clad,
And yawning sepulchres with vengeance teem.

ARZACES.

Have I not then been try'd enough, ye gods!
Was it for this you fav'd me from the rage
Of death, to make me feel severer pangs?
SEMIRAMIS— I then receiv'd my life
Amidst flagitious greatness, splendid crimes.
My mother— Heavens, what dire discoveries!

IN A TRAGEDY.

55

If the curst ASSUR were alone to blame;
Could it be prov'd —

OROES, *putting the letter into his hands.*

— These sacred characters
The myſteries of horror fully prove;
The record of her crime you here behold:
Do you ſtill doubt? —

ARZACES.

— I would to heaven I could!
Shew me the letter, that there may remain
No flatt'ring doubt —

OROES.

— Alas! it is too clear.

ARZACES *reads.*

*The dying Ninus to his faithful friend Phradates.
I dye poiſon'd; take care of my ſon; preſerve Ninias
from his cruel enemies; my guilty wife —*

OROES.

And does not that convince you? NINUS' hand,
Which wrote your fate, was then benumb'd by death.
PHRADATES in this letter tells the reſt;
His evidence the fatal news confirms.
Let that ſuffice; 'tis NINUS lifts your arm:
He from his tomb will guide you to his throne;
He calls for blood —

ARZACES, *after having read the letter.*

Oh day with wonders fill'd!
Thou hell that didſt addreſs me, thy dire words
Are more obſcure to my confounded mind,
Than the dark tomb to which I now am call'd,

The

The victim from the sacrificer's hid:

The choice seems dreadful —

OKOES,

— rather dread the crime.

Go in the horrors which o'ercast your soul,

Heav'n that has spoke to you will be your guide.

Think yourself now above the common lot,

Entrusted with the great decrees of heaven;

Mark'd by the gods, and set apart from men;

Though darkness hangs upon your fate, advance.

Weak instrument to gods from whom you spring,

You must not call in question their behests,

Preserv'd from death adore their pow'r divine,

Nor murmur, but with thankful heart obey.

S C E N E III.

ARZACES, MITRANES.

ARZACES.

These dreadful words with scorpions fill my breast;

The queen my mother! can it be, ye gods!

MITRANES *entering*.

The city, Sir, amidst the general wreck,

Calls for the king its terrors to dispel:

Receive the homage which I gladly pay

To the queen's husband, to my rightful king.

SEMIRAMIS with ardour seeks your view;

I bless the moment that unites you both.

You answer not. Despair sits on your brow.

You speak not, and your eyes with anguish roll;

A livid

A TRAGEDY.

57

A livid paleness spreads your cheek, your limbs
Shiver with terror: what may be the cause?

ARZACES.

Let's fly to AZEMA.

MITRANES.

— What may this mean!

Can you, my lord, so cruelly insult
The goodness of the queen, her flame, her choice,
Her heart which scorns so many kings for you?
Must then her hopes in you be all deceiv'd?

ARZACES.

Gods! 'tis SEMIRAMIS that meets my eyes!
Abode infernal, tomb of NINUS, hide
Her crimes and me within your open'd gulphs.

SCENE IV.

SEMIRAMIS, ARZACES.

SEMIRAMIS.

For you we wait, come master of the world,
Its fate depends on you as well as mine;
That badge of honour I with joy behold,
With which the pontiff has adorn'd your brow,
That sacred diadem, undoubted proof,
That heav'n and deepest hell confirm my choice.
Fierce ASSUR's faction struck with holy awe,
Yields at the voice divine, and dreads my view.
Propitious NINUS now an off'ring asks:
Grant his desire, no more defer my bliss.
All hearts are ours, our marriage all approve;
You have my love, and vain is ASSUR's rage.

I

AR-

ARZACES, *in a violent agitation,*
 Oh in the blood of that perfidious wretch !
 In his vile blood let's wash his parricide !
 Let us revenge the death of NINUS —

SEMIRAMIS.

Gods !

ARZACES, *with a distracted air.*
 Did not you tell me that his guilty arm,
Recovering himself.

Had——that he audaciously his arms turns
 Against his queen ; deserves he not my hate ?

SEMIRAMIS.

Receive my faith, and then revenge my cause.

ARZACES.

My father !

SEMIRAMIS.

—— Gods, what mean those brows severe !
 Is this that tenderness, that soft return
 Which I expected when I gave my hand ?
 'Tis true, the frightful objects we have seen,
 The dead broke loose from the profound abyss,
 May well leave terror in your mind—but I
 Dread them no more since I ARZACES see.
 Ah do not draw a low'ring cloud of grief
 O'er the first moments of so bright a day :
 Be such as I beheld you at my feet,
 When ASSUR as a master you disclaim'd ;
 No more fear NINUS, or his angry ghost,
 ARZACES my defence, my husband, speak,
 Dear prince —

ARZACES.

ARZACES.

— It is too much to bear ; I shrink
With the bare thought of such enormous crimes.
Hold —

SEMIRAMIS.

— What anguish tears his swoln heart ? yet he
Alone could to my bosom peace restore !

ARZACES.

SEMIRAMIS.

SEMIRAMIS.

Say you !

ARZACES.

Fly me for ever or deprive of life.

SEMIRAMIS.

What phrenzy's this ! say, wherefore should I fly ?
Explain this perturbation which has seiz'd
Your soul, and equal horror rais'd in mine.
Upon your face despair with ghastly hue
Gleams terrible, and harrows up my soul ;
Your blood-shot eyes inspire me with more dread
Than the rais'd dead and heav'n in league against me,
I offer you my crown with trembling hand,
And with a faltering tongue declare my love.
Some unknown instinct's strong attraction now
Urges me tow'rds you, now repels again,
And still a busy something at my heart
Mingles strange horror with my tender love.

ARZACES.

Hate me.—

SEMIRAMIS.

— No, sure you cannot wish my hate.
I'll never leave thee, never cease to love.

What means that letter which your flowing eyes
With horror read and moisten with your tears?
The cause of your refusal does it shew?

ARZACES.

It does.

SEMIRAMIS.

Let me then see it.

ARZACES.

Alas! I cannot; dare you read it?

SEMIRAMIS.

— Yes.

ARZACES.

In my possession leave the horrid scroll.

SEMIRAMIS.

From whom did you receive it? —

ARZACES.

— From the gods.

SEMIRAMIS.

How was it wrote then? —

ARZACES.

— By my father's hand.

SEMIRAMIS.

Ha! what is this you tell me? —

ARZACES.

— tremble now.

SEMIRAMIS.

Give it, that I may know what fate decrees:

ARZACES.

Beware—each word would pierce you to the heart.

SEMIRAMIS.

Let it—or clear the doubt I labour with.

Or I must think you criminal.—Dispatch.

ARZACES

A TRAGEDY.

61

ARZACES.

Oh all directing gods ! you force me to it !

SEMIRAMIS, *taking the letter.*

Obeys, ARZACES, I once more command.

ARZACES.

May this then prove the only punishment

By the just gods ordain'd for such a crime.

You'll know too much ; but 'tis your own desire.

SEMIRAMIS *to OTANES.*

What have I read ! support me, or I die.

ARZACES.

Alas all now is known. ———

SEMIRAMIS.

——— Delay no more ;

Fulfil thy destiny, and with thy sword

Relentless pierce this wretched guilty breast ;

Pour out my blood to quench my odious flame.

Nature recoils with horror at my love :

Revenge my crimes, revenge your father's death,

Strike here, my son, your mother's crimes atone.

ARZACES, *otherwise* NINIAS.

Oh rather may this sword my bosom gore,

And spill the blood which I derive from you :

Oh rather take it, and transfix a heart

That bears the sacred character of son.

SEMIRAMIS, *throwing herself upon her knees.*

I knew not pity ; be inhuman too :

Shew thyself NINUS' son, his death revenge :

Strike.—Dost thou mingle then thy tears with mine ?

O day of horror full, and of delight ! ———

Before you give the death my crimes deserve,

Ah

Ah let thy guilty mother's streaming tears
Bathe that dear hand, the minister of fate.

NINIAS.

I am your son, it is not meet that you,
However guilty, should embrace my knees.
NINIAS submissive bows, and to you swears
'The most profound respect and tender love.
He'll prove your dearest and most humble subject ;
Heav'n is pleas'd since it restores his son ;
Yield ASSUR up to the vindictive gods.

SEMIRAMIS.

Deign to accept my scepter and my crown ;
Too long I have defil'd them —

NINIAS.

— All's forgot ;

Asia shall still admire you on the throne.

SEMIRAMIS.

My crime's too great. —

NINIAS.

— Repentance will atone.

SEMIRAMIS.

NINUS commands you to assume my place ;
His angry manes fear —

NINIAS.

— They will relent :

A mother's anguish must their pity move,
Nor shall my filial tears in vain be shed.
Be careful, good OTANES, of the queen ;
Mean time deep bury'd in thy faithful breast
Be this dire mystery with care suppress.



ACT V. SCENE I.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

OTANES.

THINK that some god propitious interpos'd
 To save you, and prevent those nuptials dire :
 Astonish'd nature at your danger shrunk,
 For fear of incest she restor'd your son.
 Th' express commands of Ammon's oracle,
 Infernal voices, royal NINUS' Ghost
 Told you that all your misery should end
 When Hymen had receiv'd your second vows.
 They did not say the marriage should take place ;
 Your fate's decided since it was prepar'd.
 NINIAS reveres you ; soon the gracious gods
 A secret offering shall propitiate :
 This dreaded day insures your future bliss.

SEMIRAMIS.

Is bliss then made for such a wretch as I ?
 Tender compassion seiz'd my son ; I hope
 That now the anguish of a parent's heart
 Affects him more than NINUS and my crimes ;
 But rigour soon to pity may succeed,
 A father's murder may excite his rage.

OTANES.

Why these sad thoughts ? how can you fear a son ?

SE-

SEMIRAMIS.

Fear waits on crimes, and is their punishment.
Is this event to cruel ASSUR known?
Has he of late made any new attempt?

OTANES.

This dreadful secret is unknown to all,
The oracle of NINUS is rever'd :
Astonishment has seiz'd upon the crowd,
Nor can they guess the meaning of his words :
How serve his son ? his ashes why revenge ?
They wait in silent wonder for the time
Destin'd to end so many dire alarms,
When from the open'd shrine the god shall speak.
The frighted AZEMA with haggard eyes
Stalks round the tomb, and lifts her hands to heaven.
Your son is in the temple, and with dread
Prepares to slay the victim yet unknown :
ASSUR with sullen fury is possess'd,
And strives to rally his afflicted powers ;
I know not what new project he has form'd.

SEMIRAMIS.

Too long he has eluded my revenge ;
Seiz ASSUR quickly, load his limbs with chains ;
To my son's hands the murderer consign.
His sword eternal justice will appease
By shedding the assassin's guilty blood.
Then to his love be AZEMA restor'd,
And may their virtues all my crimes efface.
NINUS, you see my heart ; rest satisfy'd.
A mother's tenderness I still possess.
Ah who is that that so abruptly comes ?
Heav'ns ! how each object makes me start with fear !

SCENE

S C E N E II.

SEMIRAMIS, AZEMA, OTANES.

AZEMA.

Forgive me, Madam, I uncall'd intrude,
But anxious cares perplex my throbbing heart,
Permit me to embrace your royal knees.

SEMIRAMIS.

Speak, princess ; what do you desire of me ?

AZEMA.

To snatch a hero from impending fate —
Prevent a crime, to save ARZACES' life.

SEMIRAMIS.

What crime ? O heavens ! —

AZEMA.

—— He is to share your bed ;
He has betray'd me, but he lives for you.

SEMIRAMIS.

ARZACES share my bed —

AZEMA.

—— The bands of Hymen.

SEMIRAMIS.

Such union would be odious, impious, vile ;
ARZACES — what of him ? — I shudder — speak :
Explain the danger —

AZEMA.

—— Know then, gracious queen,
That in the moment that my voice implores —

SEMIRAMIS.

Proceed —

K

AZEMA.

AZEMA.

— That demi-god, whom still I fear,
In secret makes an off'ring to the gods,
Deep in that labyrinth's obscure recess,
Whose winding maze is sacred to the king ;
What crime he's to atone I cannot tell.

SEMIRAMIS.

What crime ? O heavens ! —

AZEMA.

— ASSUR, that impious wretch,
Prepares to violate the tomb by force.

SEMIRAMIS.

How ! ASSUR ! —

AZEMA.

— In the horrors of the night
A subterraneous passage he has made,
Which serves the monster's bloody purposes.
He comes to brave the dead, to brave the gods :
With sacrilegious hand inur'd to crimes,
ARZACES to deprive of life he comes.

SEMIRAMIS.

Just gods, what do I hear ? how know you this ?

AZEMA.

You may believe me, love my voice inspires ;
I've seen the villain ASSUR's hate inflam'd ;
I've seen to new rage his faction fire :
I've penetrated all his black designs,
And outwardly to his have join'd my cause ;
I've set on spies to watch his every motion :
The homicide he undertakes himself ;
He goes with sacrilegious purpose fraught,
Convinc'd that none will in that holy place

Dare

Dare to appear, since the high priest himself
 Is thence excluded by the law divine ;
 Thither he flies with haste. A rumour's spread,
 That death ARZACES as his victim waits ;
 That NINUS' wrongs his blood must expiate.
 The nobles and the people are assembled,
 Murmurs confus'd on every side are heard.
 NINUS I fear and angry heaven at once ;
 But above all I fear curst ASSUR's rage.

SEMIRAMIS.

My dearest AZEMA, heaven takes your part ;
 I see what now remains for me to do.
 Upon a mother's love you may depend ;
 Our fates, my daughter, are connected now :
 Defend your husband while I save my son.

AZEMA.

What do I hear, ye gods ! ——

SEMIRAMIS.

—— Heaven made him known,

An incest to prevent, and now inspires
 His mother, anxious to preserve her son.
 But now the time is precious. Leave me here :
 Give orders that the ministers of heaven
 And chief men of the state attend their queen.

Azema enters the porch of the temple ; Semiramis approaches the monument on the other side.

Shade of my spouse, I'll now atone thy blood.
 This is the fated instant that thy voice
 Promis'd I to the tomb should find access :
 I will obey, and arm these hands, which oft
 Have guided armies, to defend my son.
 Guards of the throne, your orders now receive

K 2

From

From brave ARZACES, and from him alone.
 You've now no queen, ARZACES is your king :
 On him the sov'reign grandeur I confer ,
 At once defend your monarch, and obey.

[The guards draw up at the bottom of the stage.]

Favour my project you all-powerful gods.

[She enters the monument.]

S C E N E III.

*Azema returning from the gates of the temple to the front
 of the stage.*

What secret purpose doth the queen revolve ?
 Can all her care th' impending crime prevent ?
 Oh prodigy ! Oh fate in darkness hid !
 Important, dreadful moment ! O ARZACES !
 Ye pow'rs ador'd, who o'er the world preside,
 Why take you from me whom you late restor'd !

S C E N E IV.

AZEMA, ARZACES, otherwise NINIAS

AZEMA.

Stay, prince, lov'd NINIAS, stay your steps awhile :
 Are you my sovereign then, and NINUS' son !

NINIAS.

Alas my birth has cover'd me with shame ;
 Sprung from the gods, I'm shock'd at my descent.
 The horrors that surround me dissipate ;
 This heart a prey to anguish fortify ;

Strengthen

A TRAGEDY.

69

Strengthen this lifted arm which now prepares
To wreak revenge on those who slew my fire.

AZEMA.

Beware how you fulfil the bloody task.

NINIAS.

A sacrifice is due, I must obey.

AZEMA.

NINUS desires not that his son should bleed.

NINIAS.

What mean you? —

AZEMA.

— Go not to that dire abode ;

A traitor lies in wait to shed your blood.

NINIAS.

Who shall prevent my going ? What shall fright me ?

AZEMA.

You are the victim doom'd to perish there ;

The villain ASSUR has with steps prophane

Trampling the sacred tomb, the gods defy'd,

And now he waits you. —

NINIAS.

— Gods ! the truth is known :

My heart's at ease, at length the victim's found.

My father poison'd by this villain, claims

The blood of the detested parricide.

By heaven guided, and by OROES taught,

Against the traitor arm'd by NINUS' self,

I need but strike the victim which the gods

Bring to my sword, devoted now to bleed.

My arm in this fell hour I plainly see

Is the blind instrument of pow'r divine.

The gods have all conducted, and my soul

Impli-

Implicitly obeys the voice of fate.
 The hand of heav'n is over us I see :
 Hell opens, ghosts from the abyfs arise,
 And portents strange are every day beheld :
 Fearless the voice divine I will obey.

AZEMA.

The ways of heaven strike terror to my soul :
 NINUS they lov'd, and yet they would not save.

NINIAS.

Murmur no more ; the gods revenge his death.

AZEMA.

Sometimes the innocent their vengeance feel ;
 The blood of guiltless victims oft they shed.

NINIAS.

Since they unite us they espouse our cause :
 The words my father utter'd they inspir'd ;
 They have restor'd my mother and my throne ;
 They have restor'd my AZEMA, and soon
 Stain'd with the guilty ASSUR's blood I'll come,
 And to the altar lead my beauteous bride.
 'Tis mine t' obey, the gods will do the rest.

S C E N E V.

AZEMA, *sola*.

In the dire vault ye gods direct his steps !
 Where will this end ? whose blood is to be shed ?
 I shudder, awful heav'n, at your decree.
 The sanguinary ASSUR is my dread :
 On the fire's ashes he may slay the son.
 Abyfs profound, whence NINUS' ghost arose,
 May this fell monster, by your depth absorb'd,

Bear

Bear to hell's gloom his unrelenting rage.
 Pour down your vengeance, heaven, your thunders lance.
 Ah wherefore, NINUS, didst thou not permit
 His trembling mistress to attend your son ?
 NINUS defends him in the dark abode ;
 I hear his voice amidst those horrid shrieks.
 Should the mausoleum, by my steps profan'd,
 Gape wide to swallow me in instant death ;
 I will descend——hark, thunders burst around,
 'The lightning's blaze glares hideous through the gloom,
 And the earth trembles wherefoe'er I tread.
 I float 'twixt hope and fear. He comes ——

S C E N E VI.

NINIAS enters with a bloody sword in his hand.

NINIAS.

—— Good heaven !

Where do you guide my steps ? ——

AZEMA.

—— Alas, my lord,

You drop with blood, your cheek a deadly pale
 Bespreads, and horror chills your very frame.

NINIAS.

You see me cover'd with the traitor's blood.
 Thro' the dark tomb conducted by my fire,
 Some time I wander'd in the gloomy maze,
 Trembling with awe, with horror, and surprise ;
 He march'd before me : I observ'd the place
 By the indignant spirit pointed out.
 Near to a column from the light remote,
 Which gleam'd obscurely through the dismal gloom,
 A weapon

A weapon glitter'd in the villain's hand :
 Trembling he stood.—On guilt fear ever waits.—
 I pierc'd him twice with my revengeful sword,
 And with an arm by fierce resentment strung,
 I dragg'd his squallid body o'er the dust
 To where the glimm'ring light malignant shone ;
 But I will own his thick and frequent sobs,
 His feeble plaintive cries, his deep-fetch'd groans,
 The gods whom he invoc'd, and the remorse
 That seem'd to seize him in the pangs of death ;
 The holy place ; compassion too, whose voice
 Is heard soft-pleading when revenge is o'er ;
 Some thought perplex'd which shakes my very soul,
 Made me retire, and leave the bloody corse.
 Whence can this inward perturbation spring ?
 What means this horror which invades my breast ?
 My heart and hands are innocent, ye gods ;
 The blood with which I reek yourselves proscib'd ;
 Can they who serve you with remorse be torn !

AZEMA.

You've paid your debt to Nature and the dead.
 Let's leave this dire abode, and seek the queen ;
 This agitation in her presence calm,
 Since ASSUR is no more.—

S C E N E VII.

NINIAS, AZEMA, ASSUR.

ASSUR appears at a distance with Otanes and the queen's guards.

AZEMA.

— Good heavens, 'tis he !

NINIAS.

A TRAGEDY.

73

NINIAS.

ASSUR !

AZEMA.

— Approach, ye ministers of heaven ;
Ye servants of the crown, defend your king.

S C E N E VIII.

*The High-priest, Oroes, the Magi, and people, Ninias,
Azema, Assur disarmed, Mitranes.*

MITRANES.

Our monarch does not want assistance now ;
I caus'd the bloody traitor to be seiz'd
As he prepar'd to force this holy place.
I now into your hands deliver him.

NINIAS.

What have I done ? what victim have I slain ?

OROES.

Heaven is content, our vengeance is complet.

[*Shewing Assur.*

Oh sons of Babylon, you there behold
The parricide by whom your king was poison'd.

[*Shewing Ninias.*

There you behold the monarch's rightful heir.
Before you all I own him sovereign lord ;
NINIAS restor'd with loyal hearts receive.

ASSUR.

Art thou then NINIAS ? —

OROES.

— A vindictive god,
Whose vengeance hangs o'er thy devoted head,
Preserv'd him from thy machinations dire.

L

ASSUR.

ASSUR.

Say, did'st thou from the queen receive thy birth?

NINIAS.

Yes, and her power to punish thy foul deeds.

Of this inhuman monster purge the earth:

He was not worthy by my hand to fall.

In ignominious tortures let him die;

The blood of such a wretch would stain my sword.

Semiramis appears in a dying condition at the foot of the tomb; one of the Magi supports her.

ASSUR.

To see the king's my greatest punishment;

[Observing Semiramis.]

I leave you still more wretched than myself:

Behold that tomb; thy bloody work behold.

NINIAS.

Ye gods, what blood has my blind fury shed!

AZEMA.

Dear husband, fly from hence —

MITRANES.

— What have you done?

OROES, placing himself between the tomb and Ninias.

Go purify your hands besmear'd with gore;

Give me that fatal sword, blind instrument

Of wrath divine, which has o'ertaken guilt.

NINIAS, running to Semiramis.

Ah rather let me plunge it in my breast.

OROES, whilst attendants disarm Ninias.

From his own frantic rage preserve your king.

SEMI-

SEMIRAMIS, *being brought forward, and plac'd in an elbow-chair, speaks as follows.*

My son revenge your mother ; by the sword
Of a blood-thirsty parricide I die.

NINIAS.

Oh heavy hour ! Oh deed as black as hell !
This parricide, this monster is your son !
I've pierc'd the breast which yielded nourishment
To my weak infancy—but soon the grave
Shall join us both—you soon shall be reveng'd.

SEMIRAMIS.

To save your life the sepulchre I enter'd.
Your hapless mother hasten'd to your aid—
The death to my offences justly due
Your hand inflicted, and they are aton'd.

NINIAS.

My soul recoils with horror at the thought ;
I here attest the gods, the gods whose power
My arm misguided —

SEMIRAMIS.

Son, let that suffice :

I pardon all that's past ; let that dear hand,
As a last favour, close my dying eyes.

Ninias *throws himself upon his knees, and Semiramis continues,*

I beg this favour by the blood that streams
From my gor'd breast, that blood that gave you birth.
Thy hand was not conducted by thy heart.
By NINUS' death I real guilt incurr'd :
I now am punish'd. There are crimes so black
As to exclude all hopes of grace divine !

NINIAS and AZEMA in Hymen's bands
 United, strive to wipe away the stains
 Which my misdeeds have brought upon our race.
 To your expiring mother both draw nigh :
 Give me your hands——may you reign happy long :
 That hope some comfort yields ; it mixes joy
 With all the horrors of my cruel death.
 It comes—I feel it—let SEMIRAMIS
 Live in your memory—my son ! my son !
 I can no more—— *[dies.]*

OROS.

—— The light forakes her eyes ;
 Succour your monarch, of his life take care.
 By this example one great truth's reveal'd,
 No crime can from the gods remain conceal'd ;
 Upon the great they're ever most severe ;
 Hear this, ye monarchs, and their justice fear.



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